Critical & Analytical Essays

Female and the Occult: Re-defining Female Autonomy in Stree and Bulbbul

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Abstract:

This paper explores the theme of female autonomy extensively with special reference to demanding female authority, rights, and freedom through the 'occult' form. The study involves a literary analysis of two popular Bollywood films *Stree* (2018) and *Bulbbul* (2020) and their larger-than-life portrayals of female autonomy in the occult form. Also, the paper tries to analyze how males become 'the secondary sex' in a patriarchal society while women are considered the dominant. This paper highlights females' retreat over the male dominated society. Also, a subtle critique of the imposition of the mumpsimus ways of the society upon women, is presented in the paper. The binary between the male order and female subjugation has been completely overturned in these films. Though represented in occult forms, the female protagonists in these films symbolize every woman from every sphere and enforces the idea that men become recreants when facing any challenge or when restricted from enjoying freedom and power. Moreover, through feminist theories and readings, the study includes the theoretical analysis of women's emancipation within the surroundings of *Stree* and *Bulbul*. Through the lens of feminism, the study provides an explorative area of how these films highlight the subverted gender dynamics. The paper also presents female empowerment challenging the long-standing patriarchal traditions and the societal expectations to accept the autonomy of women in occult practices.

Keywords: Self-authority, justice, occult, female, autonomy, films.

The horror genre in literature as well as in films has been a distinct genre from the other genres. It has always dealt with depictions of some ghosts, monsters, or supernatural beings since ages. However, Noël Carroll is his book *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) asserts that

> ...if a case can be made that a monster or a monster entity is a necessary condition for horror, such a criterion would not be a sufficient condition. For monsters inhabit all sorts of stories—such as fairy tales, myths and odysseys—that we are not inclined to identify as horror. (16)

The horror genre evokes mystery, thrill, and suspense by representing the occult, often focusing on female occult beings who have haunted societies for a very long time. While some films depict futuristic worlds at the cost of the occult, many explore women in supernatural roles. In *Psycho* (1960), the female is a castrating mother, while *The Exorcist* (1973) portrays a possessed girl. *The Hunger* (1983) presents the female womb as monstrous. Women in the occult face marginalization not only in mainstream religions but also within Western esoteric movements (Carroll 16). Throughout history, female mystics and prophetesses, such as those in the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century, navigated between orthodoxy and heresy. However, fear of their power often reinforced their influence. Occult literature, particularly when infused with feminist thought, is further excluded from mainstream discourse, where traditional structures dictate truth and meaning, thus challenging societal narratives of gender and power. Moreover, films have a greater impact on the audience as they have the capability of providing a message with sound entertainment as well. The narrative structures of many such films are intricately woven to manifest the authority of the females in society over males through the presentation of the woman as an occult being. Moreover, according to Patricia White, these films focus on how women form a subgroup of their own, often set away from the shackles and rules of patriarchal society (3-10).

Representation of females in Indian cinema has changed over the years. Indian cinema has always reflected traditional societal norms and how females have adjusted to these. Women being portrayed as 'heroines' and conforming themselves to

these practices, have impacted and shaped female audiences through decades. During the 1960s female characters or heroines were presented as traditional archetypes of sacrifice with females like Waheeda Rehman, Sadhana and many more. While in the 1970s the representation transitioned from traditional archetypes to more glamorous and socially conscious females, Zeenat Aman, Parveen Babi, Heema Malini were among the popular faces of this era. The females were not portrayed to have the authority of protecting themselves from any kind of evil. For instance, in *Sholay* (1975), Veeru (Dharmendra) and Jay (Amitabh Bachchan) have to rescue Basanti (Heema Malini) from the hands of Gabbar Singh (Amjad Khan). In the 1995 film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, Raj (Shah Rukh Khan) has to come to India to confess her love to Simran (Kajol) and also win her parents' heart. However, the portrayal of women and heroines in Indian cinema has changed to which Kumari Pallavi and Priyanka Singh shed their light:

> In the 80s, films like *Arth* and *Mirch Masala* captured the essence of the era, delving into intricate narratives and social issues. The 90s witnessed powerful portrayals in "Damini" and *Bandit Queen*, shedding light on societal injustices. Moving into the 2000s, films like *Dor* and *Lajja* continued to challenge norms. The 2010s brought contemporary narratives with films like *Raazi* and *Pink*, addressing pertinent issues. As we step into the 2020s, *Thappad* and *Gangubai Kathiwadi* are making waves, contributing to the evolving landscape of Indian cinema. (229)

Women are shown to be independent, making their own decisions and even having the same place in the workplace as men. But in society her place still remained secondary. Similarly, women in the horror field were not commonly acknowledged. Ghosts were often men and had immense power to destroy the world, and to put an end to the ghostly being, the hero of the film was being called upon. The Indian horror industry was pioneered and dominated by the Ramsay brothers from the 1970s to the 1990s. Though their horror beings have dominantly been men but in *Veerana* (1988), female spirit is portrayed as seductive and vampish spirit. As Rituparna Sengupta writes:

> Hindi horror film, especially comedies, have invited the audience's laughter at the collective fear of predatory women and also horror at social practices and traditions that continue to repress female desire and autonomy. (9)

In early Indian movies, female ghosts were presented as 'women in white' featuring them as tragic, romantic or wronged figures as in Kamal Amrohi's *Mahal* (1949) starring Madhubala. By the mid-1960s the 'white sari' troupe became common in the films like *Woh Kaun Thi* (1964) and *Kohra* (1964). Even though films began acknowledging females as ghosts but they were not made to fear or be horrified of. The appearance of the female ghosts was tied to the idea of beauty standards to represent their submissiveness. Naomi Woolf in *The Beauty Myth: How Beauty Images are Used Against Women* (1990) writes:

> The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called "beauty" objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless. (12)

Later in the 2000s the focus shifted from 'white sari' female ghosts to 'psychological horror' and 'possession' as in *Bhool Bhulaiya* (2007) where women are victims of malevolent force rather than purely evil beings. And from the 2000s to the 2010s the picture of female ghosts changed in Indian cinema. In the 2010s female ghosts began to be portrayed as 'chudails' ('witches') or supernatural beings where they were victims of patriarchal society and returned to reclaim her autonomy in films like *Stree*, *Bulbbul*, and *Pari* (2018), *Roohi* (2021). The early female ghosts in Indian cinema transformed from passive submissive figures to often successful and vengeful protagonists. And female witches or ghosts are no more

presented with so-called beauty standards rather with twisted feet, horrific appearance and practising unnatural activities.

Women often have an unknown fear of staying out late at night, a fear of being harassed by men in society. These fears allow patriarchal structure to confine women into a periphery of restrictions. Night is often considered as a time when women are discouraged from stepping out or staying outside for long hours at night. These rules are deliberately made by the patriarchal society to depict women as weak. Women have been made to think that night time is equivalent to something 'dangerous' or 'horrifying'. Even if women are allowed to step out of the threshold, they are given deadlines to return back home before it is too late at night. Even mothers advise their daughters to return home as soon as possible. While women staying out for long are often slut-shamed yet these age long restrictions have made it very natural for men to step out or stay out for long at night without any character assassination. Films like *Stree* (2018) and *Bulbbul* (2020) subvert this idea by further subverting gender roles. The female protagonists in the films Stree and Bulbbul respectively serve as a source of an unknown fear for the patriarchal society. What women feared about men no longer remains the same in these films. It is the men who are not allowed to step out of their house at night. The male community would not have faced challenges from the female community and confined them indoors, if the women were not presented in 'occult' forms. As the protagonists are presented in the 'occult' forms, the male community's fear is doubled. The women are portrayed not as victims rather agents of justice to womanhood. Mostly depicted in 'occult' form because the society fails to accept when the female self tries to establish her authority through her normal human self, or through the fact when they try to parallel the intellect of men. Instead, she compels the same patriarchal society to accept her and also autonomy in her occult form so that she can enjoy her freedom and rights and not stand as a jeopardized being (Wallraven 35-50).

Though both films belong to the same genre of gothic and mostly the incidents manifest at night time, yet the storytelling of each of the films is different from one another. Even the time period in which the two films are set, are quite distinct. While

Stree is set in the twenty-first century, *Bulbbul* has a setting of pre-independent Bengal. Although the time frame of the films differs, what is similar is the female suffering across ages and places. The female protagonists also have the similar kind of quest to create a utopian world for themselves and other women, where they are free from patriarchy and remain unquestioned, with a challenge to subvert the male order. *Stree* (2018), which tells the story of Chanderi, a town in Madhya Pradesh, and its residents, specifically males, who are in utter trauma due to the presence of Stree, a ghostly character. The story revolves around a four-day festivity where women go to the temple and male stay confined at home due to the authoritative power of Stree upon the male sex. The character of Stree is not omnipresent but only comes during these specific four days and captures men whom she finds outside their home at night, breaking the age-old stereotypical norm that prevents women from staying out at night. But Stree subverts this practice and male safety is at stake, and firmly establishes her authority as her presence is threatening the whole male society. On the other hand, in the film *Bulbbul*, the titular character was raised in the conventional ways by which women are often compelled to internalize the standards set by the patriarchal society. The narrative of the film is set back in the 1881 Bengal Presidency. The story begins with the marriage of Bulbbul with a man named Indranil portrayed by actor Rahul Bose, who also plays his identical twin, Mahendra in the film. Indranil was thrice the age of Bulbbul. Since the practice of child marriage was common in the nineteenth century, it was thought normal that Bulbbul gets married to man thrice his age. But when Bulbbul's wedding was taking place, she knew and saw Satya was the one she was getting married to. Bulbbul believed Satya to be her husband but Indranil made her realise and also made her believe it was Indranil himself with whom she got married, she was a child but once she was an adult she would understand the difference between husband and brother-in-law.

From the very beginning, *Bulbbul* illuminates upon women internalizing the patriarchal norms which subjugate women to a secondary gender in the society. The same manifests in a conversation between Bulbul and her Pishima (aunt). A few moments before she was getting married when

Pishima makes Bulbbul wear a toe ring and the latter asks the significance of it:

> Bulbbul - Pishima, bichuye kyun pehente hai? (Aunty, why are toe rings worn?) [4:29]
>
> Pishima - Kyunki yaha par ek nass hoti hai, usse dabao na toh ladki udh jaati hai. (Because there's a nerve here which if not pressed, the girl flies away.) [4:32]
>
> Bulbbul - Chidiye ki tarah? (Like birds?) [4:38]
>
> Pishima - Nahi vash mein karne k liye hoti hai bichuye. (No, to control women.) [4:43]

This conversation between Bulbbul and Pishima suggests that even women teach other women that they need to be controlled by the males of the society so that they do not gain any authority of their own. However, after Bulbbul meets her brother-in-law, Satya, who was almost contemporary to her, gets very friendly with him. He narrates to her the folklore of a witch which was quite prevalent in his village. He described the witch to have twisted feet, and Bulbbul somehow subconsciously internalized the witch into herself. In their growing years they became more friendly and fond of each other. However, in *Stree*, women are not portrayed as conforming to the patriarchal structure because Stree's supernatural powers to capture men is shown from the very beginning. Women in this film are not seen as weak. They respect the traditional values yet quite modern in their thoughts. Both Stree and Bulbbul are victims of male domination yet the former avenges after her death and the latter during her lifetime not revealing her vengeful identity.

Stree despite being a prostitute during her lifetime, fell in love with a man, who remains unnamed throughout the film but is believed to have taken a rebirth with the name Vicky, a character played by Raj Kumar Rao. It was a crime in the eyes of the patriarchal society for a prostitute to fall in love. The social stigma of being a prostitute is tied with just physical pleasure and no emotional values. When Stree and her lover had decided to get married, her amorous affair with the man was not accepted by the society, due to her social status. The male in her

village was attracted to her charm, treating her as an object of their male gaze. This male gaze has been described by Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* as she asserts:

> The woman is displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threaten to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma…or complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object so it becomes reassuring than dangerous. (438)

The people of Chanderi later killed Stree and her unnamed lover. Also, her wish to spend the first night of her marriage with her lover remained unfulfilled. She then returns after her death to find her lover and fulfill her unquenched wish. Stree even re-affirms her autonomy by reinforcing the fact that she doesn't need any permit to roam about at night, which is considered a taboo in society for a female to roam at night alone, and also has the power to visit Chanderi at a particular time every year. This brings up the fact that society only accepts her authority as she is a ghost and has the power to capture men whom she finds out at night. Whereas, *Bulbbul* presents a complex narrative of patriarchal oppression, female subjugation, and ultimate rebellion through its titular character. Binodini, played by Paoli Dam, harbors resentment towards Bulbbul, envying her marriage to Indranil while she is wedded to Indranil's mentally unstable twin, Mahendra. Despite her extramarital affair with Indranil, Binodini's social position remains secondary, reinforcing the gendered hierarchy within the household. The term 'men' itself is considered superior to women without having any other supernatural power. Whereas for a woman, she has to do something unnatural or irregular to gain her freedom and autonomy in society and even in her life. The same society did not accept her amorous affair with a person in her lifetime as she was a prostitute. But the men from Chanderi also enjoyed her company. They thought their trivial attention to Stree would only matter in her life and she does not need any emotional validation as a woman in the society. This mere act of just paying attention to a woman for their sexuality is brought

about by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) where she asserts:

> Women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when, in fact, men are insultingly supporting their own superiority. It is not condescension to bow to an inferior. (10)

As Wollstonecraft says women are 'degraded', she means that women are often put down through superficial acts of attention or politeness by the male. In doing so the males show their superiority contrasting women to be inferior and need to be attended with politeness. In *Stree*, till the time Stree is considered just an 'object' of pleasure, she gets attention from men. They 'degrade' her both physically and mentally as a vulnerable being, craving male acts of attention. But when she wanted to experience the freedom of her life, she was murdered, proving that a woman can never exercise autonomy, power and freedom and they should remain inferior. So, Stree wishes to punish those men and generations of men after her death because what she was denied in her lifetime, can easily be achieved from the society by taking a revenge from the same society who once led to her and her lover's death. Also, this puts forward the fact that no person, especially men, can protest or prove to be a hindrance in safeguarding themselves from Stree's arrest. She even subverts the gendered norms where men are forced to wear saree at night to pretend to be women, realising how important it is to be a woman to remain free in the town of Chanderi at night and also to safeguard themselves because Stree never harmed or captured women so to wear and bangles were safe than to be a part of the threatened male grouping in the town. The same happens with Bulbbul when is married off as a child to a man thrice her age. Bulbbul in Wollstonecraft's words is also 'degraded' to mere acts of normalcy because she was a child with no maturity about what had happened to her. Both the fact that she is a girl and a child, gives Indranil and other people to consider her inferior and vulnerable. In the opening of the film *Bulbbul* when young Satya and Bulbbul meet for the first time, Satya remarks looking at Bulbbul "Thodi maili hai, par kaam chala lenge" ("Bit of a scruffy urchin, but we will take of her").

Satya at the young age was not aware of his remarks but the audience can very well understand that Satya is taught in such ways of considering women to be less important. Wollstonecraft's idea of women being degraded finds its manifestation in their meeting, as it the men who will manage with Bulbbul being a bit dark complexed, suggesting that they are being very much kind towards Bulbbul.

Sigmund Freud in his essay "Fetishism" (1927) points "Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital" (qtd. in Creed: 28). This is also quite evident in the film Stree because male existence even cannot accept the fact of being threatened by a mere female, rather a ghostly female. Stree, although captures men at night, leaves a sign by leaving the apparels of the man she had captured on the road, and taking him with him naked, where males remain threatened. This may suggest a kind of advocacy on her part forcing other men to realize how important it is to be a woman and also to respect women, who wherever and however can establish their autonomous self and demand their rights. She even compels the men not to think women as mere entities and counterparts of males. Also, Stree is presented to be a literate occult woman, which is evident when she sees "O Stree kal aana" ("O Stree come tomorrow") written on the walls of the houses of Chanderi, she respects that idea and does not capture the man that particular night she had come for. Similarly, an unnamed female character is played by Shraddha Kapoor in *Stree*, who portrays similar characteristics as Stree. For instance, she visits the town of Chanderi only during the four-day festivity at night. She encounters Vicky and promises to go to the temple with him at night. She also paralleled the power of Stree to move freely. But she always comes to meet Vicky after the festivities are over. Vicky's friends Jana and Bittu, played by Abhishek Banerjee and Aparshakti Khurana respectively, believe her to be the same Stree. Yet, Shraddha Kapoor's character is not presented in any occult form but she practices black magic to gain supernatural powers to save women, which she reveals herself later. Even Bulbbul, when finds comfort and solace in Satya's company, becomes the reason for her physical torment. Bulbbul's growing intellectual and emotional bond with Satya, her brother-in-law,becomes the catalyst for her

suffering. Binodini manipulates this connection, informing Indranil in hopes of shifting his attention towards herself. The metaphor of the loosening toe ring symbolizes Bulbbul's perceived transgression—her increasing autonomy and intellectual engagement. Indranil, embodying patriarchal authority, responds with extreme violence, brutally assaulting Bulbbul. This moment marks a turning point, stripping Bulbbul of her physical agency and leading to further victimization. Mahendra's subsequent rape of the bedridden Bulbbul, resulting in her permanently twisted feet, cements her status as an object of patriarchal violence. This emphasizes the fact that females irrespective of their bodily representations have the same rights in the society and do not need to confine themselves to the conventional norms of the society. However, the presentation of women in the occult or a monstrous form is important as Barbara Creed in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993) asserts:

> I have used the term 'monstrous-Feminine' as the term 'female monster' implies a simple reversal of 'male monster'. The reason why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience. A new term is needed to specify these differences. As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity. (33)

In Creed's words 'monstrous-feminine' is important in understanding the difference between male monsters and female monsters. She believes that female monsters need a different emphasis in matters of how they are horrific in nature. This concept of 'monstrous-feminine' is very evident in both the films and this concept becomes the motif for the protagonists to find their freedom and assert their authority. The motif of the twisted feet becomes crucial in *Bulbbul*; it not only marks her trauma but also serves as the literal imprint of her supernatural transformation, making her both invisible and omnipresent in her vengeance. Mahendra's death, seemingly unnatural due to

the inverted footprints, signals a subversion of power dynamics—Bulbbul, once the victim, now reclaims agency by enacting justice. Bulbbul's revenge extends beyond personal retribution to systemic justice. She eliminates Master Dinkar, a domestic abuser who, under societal norms, maintains an outwardly respectable persona. This challenges the dichotomy between public virtue and private brutality, exposing male hypocrisy. The occult elements of the film serve as a metaphor for female resistance. As the village is plagued by a series of murders, the audience gradually realizes that Bulbbul, transformed by her trauma, has assumed the role of the avenging 'chudail' (witch). Bulbbul's acts of vengeance are not arbitrary but serve as a direct challenge to the systemic subjugation of women. By eliminating men who perpetuate violence—such as Mahendra, her rapist, and Gadiwan, who drove his first wife to suicide—she disrupts the unchecked authority of men over women's bodies and lives. Her transformation into the so-called witch symbolizes not just revenge but a radical assertion of female autonomy, a refusal to remain confined by patriarchal dictates. Similarly, Stree's monstrous form is important for establishing her identity, power, agency and not just a simple source of horror. Stree's monstrosity becomes an active warrior against patriarchy unlike other female ghost characters in other films who are victimised. This supernatural entity allows Stree to subvert the gendered power dynamics - instead of women being preyed upon, men become the targets. In *Bulbbul*, Bulbbul punished men who did wrong to women but Stree on the other hand targets all men of Chanderi whoever she finds in the streets at night. Stree finds all men accountable for her unquenched love and freedom. Creed's idea of 'monstrous-feminine' is important for Stree's supernatural identity because it destabilizes society's idea of monstrosity as just a source of horror but rather a response to injustice. Once Stree remained just a prostitute, a woman of pleasure, being unacknowledged of her identity as a human being, a woman and her existence. Her monstrous identity allows her to reclaim her existence even being a non-existent creature; not just simple reclamation but complete acknowledgement of her non-existing identity. What she was deprived of in her life, she snatched it away through fear and

made justice with herself. Manaar Kamil Sa'eed, Haider Saad Yahya Jubran write:

> Horror movies depict female characters as sexual, helpless victims. When horror movies try to reveal female characters as the hero of the story, this gave a message to audiences that women can be powerful and independent. (16)

The films, therefore, blur the lines between victim and perpetrator, justice and vengeance, and ultimately reclaim the vilified image of the monstrous-feminine as symbols of female power (Broedel 180).

Women's beauty and their identity as a woman is important for men's understanding of them as harmless beings. Beauty and sexuality define women to be inferior and not dangerous. *Bulbbul* and *Stree* both represent this idea. Bulbbul's conversation with Satya further highlights these gendered assumptions—when he dismisses the possibility of a woman committing such violent acts, it underscores the deeply ingrained belief that women, by nature, are incapable of transgression. Satya's belief that such brutal killings can only be committed by a man further reflects ingrained gender biases that equate violence and power with masculinity. His inability to recognize a woman as capable of retribution exposes the patriarchal refusal to acknowledge female agency beyond passive victimhood. This ideological bias, equating power and violence with masculinity, renders Bulbbul's transformation unimaginable to those around her. Also, in *Stree* when Vicky goes to meet Shraddha Kapoor, and tells her about his friend Jana's abduction and questions her whether it is her who is Stree too due her mysterious character. She disappears in a few seconds and also creeps in without anyone noticing. This made Vicky question her identity but he is also not willing to believe that such a beautiful lady can be Stree. When confronting Bittu about Shraddha Kapoor's mysterious nature, both share a conversation about this

> Bittu "Kabhi kabhi dosto ka bhi sun liya karo" ("You should listen to your friends as well") [1:11:43]

> Vicky; to which Vicky replies, "Par itni sundar stree, Stree kaise ho sakti hai!" ("But how can a beautiful woman like her be Stree!") [1:11:47]
>
> Bittu "Sundar thi kya? Sorry." ("Was she beautiful? Sorry.") [1:11:50]

Bittu who was doubtful of this mysterious woman of being Stree immediately changes his opinion when heard she is beautiful. Men have set superficial and unrealistic beauty standards about women. If she is beautiful, she can never be dangerous. Satya did not believe Bulbbul that women are capable of transgression, they are not harmful beings. Significantly, only Dr. Sudip, played by Parambrata Chatterjee, is privy to the extent of Bulbbul's physical trauma. His knowledge of her twisted feet places him as a silent observer rather than an active disruptor of her revenge, subtly aligning him with her resistance against patriarchy. Whereas Vicky and Bittu believe a beautiful woman cannot be a ghost. A beautiful woman like her is not capable of abducting men. The fear both Bulbbul and Stree instill among men functions as a deterrent, shifting the power dynamics within the village. As Creed asserts "Witches were feared because it was thought they could cast terrible spells and bring death to those they cursed" (276). So Bulbbul and Stree are feared by the male community. The legend of the witch, previously a tool to control women through fear, is subverted - Bulbbul and Stree use it to make men accountable for their actions. This reversal highlights the films' broader critique of societal structures that deem women either divine and submissive or monstrous and dangerous, denying them the right to occupy any space in between.

Later, towards the end of the film, Stree captures Vicky is again saved by Shraddha Kapoor, and Stree finds her lost lover in Vicky but her power leads to an end when Shraddha Kapoor cuts Stree's braid and blends it with hers, getting all her powers. As she sits herself in the bus to leave Chanderi, vanishes in a fraction of seconds after blending the braids, suggesting in the transfer of Stree's power to her where she too can apply her will and not be restrained by the society's standards. Also, people of Chanderi uses the slogan later "O Stree raksha karna" ("O Stree protect us") that means, if men in Chanderi need to be safe, they

need to be protected by Stree and other women from any kind of evil and in return respect women's demands and equally take part in every activity meant to be performed by females alone. On the other hand, Bulbbul's delight on the day of Mahendra's funeral is not just personal triumph but symbolic of a larger ideological shift—she is no longer the child bride silenced by the household but a force capable of rewriting the narrative. Their vengeance is not just an act of personal justice; it is a declaration that women, too, have desires, autonomy, and the power to retaliate against systemic violence. Through this lens, Bulbbul and Stree reclaim the image of the 'witch' as a feminist icon rather than a figure of fear (Broedel 168-70).

The representation of the occult female in films like Stree and Bulbbul serves as a metaphor for the suppressed voices of women who have been denied their rights for centuries. Through these films, the audience witnesses how oppression and neglect can transform a woman into a formidable force, compelling society to acknowledge her existence and demands. The patriarchal mindset, which disregards women's voices in everyday life, is ironically forced to listen when the same voices emerge in an unconventional or supernatural form. This highlights the hypocrisy of a society that fears power but refuses to respect equality. The occult being in these films becomes a symbol of not just vengeance but also justice—restoring balance where inequality has prevailed. Furthermore, these films subtly critique the deep-seated gender biases that restrict women from making independent choices. They also challenge traditional notions of femininity and weakness, proving that a woman's strength is undeniable when she decides to fight back. The supernatural elements serve as an allegory for resistance, where the female spirit refuses to remain confined within patriarchal boundaries. Thus, the occult form is not merely a source of fear but a manifestation of repressed power, breaking through years of suppression and injustice.

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